

The Wisconsin Cooperative Conservation Initiative (WCCI)
EPA Region 5 - Chicago

Geographic location or area of activity: The project is located in the headwaters of the Rock River Watershed in central Wisconsin. It includes the Horicon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge which is the focus of several habitat protection and restoration initiatives, and is a high priority for agricultural conservation and water quality improvement efforts.

Description of activity: This 2004 multi-agency partnership was created to multiply the benefits of federal and state conservation programs by encouraging agencies to focus resources on a high priority watershed across the state.

Key accomplishments include:

- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation committed more than \$215,000 in funds to restore and evaluate projects in the watershed. These funds were matched by more than \$340,000 in non-federal dollars. An additional special allocation of \$500,000 in federal EQIP funds amounted to more than \$1,000,000 invested in the watershed as a result of this partnership.
- USFWS private lands biologists are working with NRCS to identify Conservation Security Program (CSP) contract holders with potential wildlife habitat restoration projects that benefit designated CSP species. WCCI members compiled, and provided to NRCS, a list of landowners whose operations affected priority landscapes, species of concern and priority water quality resources, for special outreach and education efforts.
- USFWS convened a work group that created a document for local landholders which identified methods to control invasive reed canary grass, a barrier to CSP participation as identified by NRCS.
- Supplemental EQIP funding and related efforts complement WDNR's Glacial Habitat Restoration Area (GHRA) project's goal of restoring 11,000 acres of wetland and 38,600 acres of grassland within a four county area around Horicon Marsh. To date the GHRA has restored 4,718 acres of habitat in the Upper Rock watershed.
- WDNR and the Dodge County Land Conservation Department are conducting a Manure Management Pilot Project in the Kummel Creek subwatershed, specifically intended to evaluate water quality impacts of manure management practices in a concentrated, high-priority area.
- In August 2006, the USFWS funded an individual to speak with producers about their current practices, identify ways to improve agricultural efficiency and maximize environmental improvements in the Horicon Marsh. The anticipated outcome of this work is an inventory of producer farm practices, increased farm enrollment in conservation programs and implementation of conservation practices.

UWEX has developed a baseline assessment protocol to evaluate conservation practices among the partners in the field, collected information on partner activities to date, generated maps of priority areas, and in cooperation with local partners, will soon be launching a survey of agricultural producers in the priority WCCI areas. Baseline results are expected to be available in 2008, will be used to evaluate future conservation practices in the Rock River basin.

Interagency partners: The partnership includes members of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation , US Department of Agriculture – Natural Resource Conservation Service, Department of the Interior-US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Environmental Protection Agency, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin-Extension, and local resource management partners.

Local partners: Dodge County Land Conservation Department and local landholders.